- Harnessing modern scientific knowledge to develop inbred varieties and hybrids which are high yielding, resistant/tolerant to relevant biotic and abiotic stress and efficient in input use with emphasis on adoption to variable ecologies, particularly rainfed agriculture.
- Intensification of research on the development of commercially viable hybrid technology for achieving higher yield thresholds in various crops/agro-ecologies including non-traditional crops and harsh ecologies. Development and diversification of male sterility system in an important area of research;
- Development of value-added crop varieties for domestic and export markets;
- Development of varieties/hybrids suitable for mechanization, particularly sugarcane harvesting, cotton picking etc.;
- Develoment of molecular techniques/tools and their application in crop breeding with emphasis on genetic engineering of crop plants with novel gene(s) to improve productivity, stability, quality and resistance/tolerance to biotic and abiotic stresses;
- Exploration of genetic diversity, collection, ex-situ/in-situ conservation, characterization, evaluation and genetic enhancement of plant genetic resources;
- Continuing research thrust on the development of economical and eco-friendly crop production packages involving integrated nutrient, water and soil-management technologies;
- Development of integrated pest management approaches for sustainable agriculture production; and
- Refinement of seed production technology and production of breeder seed with added emphasis on hybrid cultivars.

The State Governments have also launched several schemes to increase agriculture production and productivity in their respective States. The Central Government also provides financial assistance in the implementation of some of these schemes.

Vulnerability of wheat to epidemic

1053. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the impending threat of wheat epidemic UG 99 in its most popular variety of wheat PBW 343 in the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken by Government to prevent the epidemic?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (c) Directorate of Wheat Research, Karnal has reported that all Indian wheat varieties including PBW-343 are resistant to stem rust races prevalent in India due to Sr. 31 gene. However, this gene has been reported to have become susceptible to stem rust in Africa. UG-99 race is not present in India but the Directorate of Wheat Research has, nevertheless, initiated preemptive action to incorporate resistance to this race.

Providing fertilizers and chemicals at reasonable rates

1054. SHRI VARINDER SINGH BAJWA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any steps to provide fertilizers and chemicals to poor farmers at reasonable rates;

(b) whether any specific policy has been laid down in consultation with State Governments; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (c) In order to make the fertilizer available at affordable rates to all categories of farmers, the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) of Urea is statutorily notified under Fertilizer Control Order, 1985 and MRP of the decontrolled phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilizers, such as Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP), Muriate of Potash (MOP) and Nitrogenous Phosphatic Potassic (NPK) complexes are fixed under the Concession Scheme of P&K fertilizers except Single Super Phosphate (SSP) whose price is fixed by the State Governments. The MRPs of these fertilizers except SSP in some States has not been increased since last three years though their cost of production/import price has increased. There is no Government control on pricing of chemicals as the chemical industry has been deregulated.

Training programme for farmers in Tamil Nadu

1055. SHRI N.R. GOVINDARAJAR: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have prepared any action plan for promotion, extension and upgradation of tranining programmes for farmers and soil testing facilities through National Chemical and Fertilizer Corporation or any other Government Corporation in the dry farming region of Tamil Nadu;